

I don't think there's much satire in those, is there? What would I be satirizing? A slight hint of it in *High-Rise*; but none in *Crash*, I wouldn't have thought. But it's a long time since I read that ... I haven't read *Crash* since I read the proof, so I have scarcely any idea what it's really like any more. I'd probably be appalled if I read it.

On the whole, I agree with your famously broad conception of science fiction – the idea that it takes in books like Gulliver's Travels and Crash...

Well, I've been pushing it hard for years. I thought your comparison in *Interzone* of the western and science fiction was interesting ["Interface," *IZ* 99]. I largely agreed with it. Where I would disagree is ... the difference is that the original west that inspired the western no longer exists, whereas, of course, science and technology are continually transforming the landscape in which we live. Were the 1940s and 1950s sf writers still working today – the people of the Sturgeon generation – their fiction (which was largely a naturalistic fiction, if you like, compared with today's out-and-out fantasy) would be filled with the world of microprocessors and PCs and e-mail and fax machines and the internet and all the rest of it. Science and technology are continually remaking the world, so they offer the writer a fresh inspiration, which the west, the actual west of the United States of America, no longer does because that world has vanished – I'm sure they round up their cattle using jeeps now. But I think you're right, in the sense that if one looks at *genre* sf (I haven't read very much, so I ought to keep my mouth shut, though ignorance has never deterred me from giving an opinion), it is for the most part out of touch with these developments in science and technology, it is dominated by formulas and conventions, and it has exhausted itself.

This was my objection to American sf in the 1950s and 1960s when I first started out, that it was trapped by its own formulas and was no longer responding to the actual changing environment in which we lived – which was just as full of scientific imagery as anything in *Astounding SF*, but which *Astounding* ignored. My impression of reading *Astounding*, later *Analog*, back in the 50s and 60s, was that the contemporary world that existed outside the pages of the magazine hardly ever crossed the threshold into it, except by a very roundabout route. It was all set in Campbell's invented future about a hundred years from now, on space stations and all that kind of

thing, whereas incredible changes were taking place in the world of the 1950s, which I, in my small way, was trying to track and respond to imaginatively. The world we live in now began in the late 1940s and 1950s: almost every element in our world today, with the exception of things like the internet, was being laid down then – jet travel, the consumer society, the motorway landscape, advanced new drugs, the TV and communications landscape. It was all being laid down then, but you didn't get any sense of excitement in that world, in the writers' minds, reading *Analog*. So I think your thesis is right, actually, in respect of *genre* sf.



I was referring to the labelled product, rather than the wider field. But your broader definition of sf ties in with a book called Ultimate Island by Nicholas Ruddick, a critical study of British science fiction. It's intelligent, and Ruddick praises your work and H. G. Wells's. Taking the long view, he talks about the "island" motif, which he traces through British sf from its very beginnings, from Thomas More's Utopia in the 16th century. Much of it is set on islands, or uses islands metaphorically, from Utopia to Gulliver's Travels to The Island of Dr Moreau – to Concrete Island. And this book was published a year or more before you brought out Rushing to Paradise, set on yet another island! I noticed some of the reviewers of your novel used words like "utopian" and "Wellsian." So, although it wasn't labelled sf, all this suggests you're still in the area...

Sure, fair enough: in the larger area. These are hypothetical arguments – you know, "how many angels dance on the head of a pin? Are they doing the bossanova or the tango?" If we could imagine *genre* science fiction not existing I think you would find that there would be a category of imaginative fiction that was interested in the contemporary world, filled with imagery of a scientific and technological nature taken from that world. I think it's that, in a way, that I've always been writing. Sometimes I needed to write *genre* sf in order to make a larger point, because after all I began in the 1950s and 1960s when it was extremely difficult, even in Carnell's magazines, to get over the barriers. Carnell, for example, did not at first want to accept "The Terminal Beach," and it had been turned down by quite a number of American magazines. I hadn't been able to place it anywhere; but after the success of *The Drowned World*, Gollancz brought out a collection, *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*, and then they said "let's do another one if you haven't got a novel" – and I had this story, "The Terminal Beach," which I'd not placed anywhere in the States, and Carnell was sitting on it: I don't think he knew what to do with it, it didn't fit...

You've got to remember, there had been no New Wave: I get interviewed by youngsters who think that science fiction is the most wonderful medium there is because it's so open, you can do anything with it. They don't realize that back in the late 1950s, 40 years ago, or in the 1960s even, the doors were closed to experiment of almost any kind. I've said this many times: editors were very suspicious of stories set in the present day. I used to get letters from people like Cele Goldsmith – because I got quite a few stories rejected, you know – saying "maybe if you set it in the future this idea would be OK." They were very nervous of the *genre* conventions being dismantled in any way; if somebody removed a plank the ship might start to sink. People think now that sf is wonderfully open, you can write anything, a fiction inspired by William Burroughs and Kafka at one end, Gibson at the other, taking in Ray Bradbury on the way, or anything else you like, but that wasn't the case. Carnell sat on "The Terminal Beach," and when I told him that Gollancz were going to publish it, he said, "OK, I'll publish it first in *New Worlds*," which he did. So I am trying to say that I needed to use the *genre* conventions in the early days simply to get the stuff published, smuggling in my own little ideas as I did so. Gradually, of course, things opened out, particularly when Mike Moorcock took over *New Worlds*; then

sure of the context of this piece [it appeared in *Interzone*, in 1984! – Ed.] but it is a series of statements that start "I believe in..." Whoever put the site together says "Part of Ballard's work is about our imaginations' capacity to make connections between widely disparate objects, to synthesize new forms; I've tried to reflect this by adding an ambiguous hyperlink component to his text. (And I hope he doesn't mind.)" The hyperlinks go to paragraph-length quotes from Ballard's work.

The Science Fiction Directory at <http://www.megamed.com/ronl/sf/authorae/ballard.html> lists Ballard's work in chronological order. And then there's a site called "The Electronic Labyrinth" at <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ckeepe/elab.html> which introduces itself with: "The Electronic Labyrinth is a study of hypertext technology, providing a guide to this rapidly growing field. We are most concerned with the implications of this medium for creative writers looking to move beyond traditional notions of linearity and univocity." What's this to do with Ballard? There's an analysis of *The Atrocity Exhibition* within this context.

There is also a J.G. Ballard home page at <http://www.simons-rock.edu/~craigs/ballard.html>. Point Survey rates Web sites, and gives awards to what it calls the top 5%. This site is one of them. Point provide a brief review of the site. "The meat of this page is David Pringle's semi-annual newsletter on James G. Ballard, once considered a science-fiction author (*The Drowned World* and *The Wind from Nowhere*) and now regarded as one of the most important authors of the late 20th century (*Empire of the Sun* and *The Unlimited Dream Company*). The newsletter covers books by and about Ballard, and it's also a forum to discuss his work. Reports on forthcoming Ballard books, including his first non-fiction collection, are accompanied by rumours of screenplays for *Crash* and *High Rise*, two of his earlier speculative novels. Lists of collected short stories and plot synopses of his novels (only four of 15 are covered) add padding, but not much else." Hmmm. David Pringle? Ah yes, there is a link from the Ballard page to some information about *Interzone*. There are also links to the Ballard newsletters, the synopses of the novels, and other Ballard resources, including a J.G. Ballard mailing list. To subscribe, send e-mail to jgballard-request@simons-rock.edu with the message: subscribe jgballard.

And what about this "rumour" of a screenplay for *Crash*? Back to Alta Vista for a quick search. At http://www.pkbaseline.com/baseweb/s_inp.html there is a bucketload of

information about the film. This includes country of origin, film status (wrapped), U.S. distributor, international distributors/sales, production companies, telephone, producers, director (David Cronenberg), cast information, credits, publicity, begin shooting date, completed shooting date, location, synopsis, budget estimates (\$10m-\$13m).

I read some time ago about an on-line sf magazine. Could I find it? I did, and others too. I used the search program at the World Wide Web Virtual Library (at <http://www.edoc.com/ejournal/>) to look for on-line sf publications. It gave me the following list:

Science Fiction Weekly

E-scape – the digital journal of speculative fiction

21st Century Magazine – high quality entertainment and popular science magazine

Cyberspace Vanguard Magazine of Science Fiction – interviews, news, reviews, conventions, columns, etc.

Quanta – the electronic magazine of sf and fantasy

Planet Magazine – free online quarterly of sf, fantasy, horror, humour, poetry

InterText Magazine – a free, electronically-distributed fiction magazine.

Scream Press/Whispers – poetry, sf, zine reviews, art

Century – an impressive bimonthly of speculative and fantastic fiction

Tom Cool's E-zine of Science Fiction – a webzine of sf short stories and graphic art

A fair choice I thought. *Quanta* rang a bell, so I clicked on the entry and was taken to the *Quanta* home page at <http://www.quanta.org/quanta/>. As ever, there was a range of choices. Back copies of the journal are available online, and there's a search engine that allows you to do a full text search of stories. Haven't you ever ploughed through back copies of *Interzone* looking for a reference in one particular story? A search function like this could be so useful.

The latest issue of *Quanta* was released in July 1995 and the previous one in February 1995, so it's not a frequent publication. Rather than waste the phone bill by reading it all online, I downloaded the latest PDF version. PDF stands for portable document format. It's a way of distributing properly formatted documents to a variety of computers, and is widely used. The software to enable reading and printing of the document is available for free over the Internet.

The publication was all fiction,

apart from the editorial. There were a couple of pieces of straight Virtual Reality-type sf that I enjoyed, and some more "challenging" stuff, of a sort that does appear in *Interzone* but which doesn't always appeal to my taste. The stories were well written, and the document well laid out (running to 22 pages), although the copy-editing could have been better in places. *Quanta* describes itself as "shareword," and if you enjoy the publication you are asked to send \$5, although for somebody in the UK this would probably mean sending cash in the post. There are methods of secure payment that can be used on the Internet, but they are not implemented on this site.

For those who want to know when the next issue of *Quanta* is out there is a self-registering e-mail list. Even better, the entire next release can be e-mailed to you in ASCII or postscript format (although, apparently, not PDF). And finally, for aspiring authors, *Quanta* does solicit contributions.

One of the possibilities offered by a site on the Web is that there is no need for separate editions of a publication. The journal can be updated when a good new piece of work arrives, and it doesn't even have to replace something that's already there. In his editorial Daniel K. Appelquist suggest that this is the direction he'd like to take *Quanta*, but he needs some help to do it properly. Another advantage of the Net is that this help could be provided from anywhere in the world – as long as it's reachable by e-mail.

After *Quanta*, I tried one more journal on the list, and ended up at *Science Fiction Weekly* (<http://www.mordor.com/sfw/>). This is more than just fiction, and offers links to News of the Week, On Screen, Story By, Other Cool Sci-Fi Stuff, Off the Shelf, Sci-Fi Site of the Week, Games, Mail, Submissions, Staff, Back Issues.

When I looked there was, among other things, a review of *Heavy Weather* by Bruce Sterling, and a link to what I thought was an interview with the author. It turned out not to be an interview, but a chance for readers to post the question they most want Sterling to answer. The top ten questions will be put to him in the interview, which will be published on the site.

Of all the applications that run over the Internet, e-mail has the greatest reach. E-mail can reach the networks that other services (like the Web) cannot. E-mail is not only used for one-to-one communication. There are mailing lists – at least 20,000 of which are easily accessible. With these, you subscribe yourself to the list (for free) by sending an e-mail to a defined address. Then, whenever